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SUBJECT: REGIONAL GOVERNORS - WHO ARE THEY?

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: Following a series of scandals involving the misuse of public funds by newly elected local officials, the Georgian Parliament recently passed two laws that strengthen the powers of regional Governors, who are appointed by the President, to exercise "state supervision" and ensure compliance of local self-government bodies with the "interests, goals and policy" of the state. Increasing the authority of the Governors may help with the formulation and subsequent implementation of economic development of Georgia's undeveloped regions. However, this will need to be done carefully as some may claim that these new powers are counter to the goal of decentralizing power from federal to local structures. This cable contains a brief summary of the current regional Governors of Georgia, whose personalities - some of which tend toward that of a local prince, rather than an institutional manager of local self-governance - may prove decisive in the development of Georgia's regions. End Summary.

Promising steps towards local self-government

¶3. (U) The ratification of the European Charter on Local Self-governance and subsequent adoption of the Law on Local Self-governance by the Georgian parliament in 2005 created the political and legal environment required for the development of full-fledged self-government institutions. The new legislation envisaged the termination of the existing subordination of local bodies to the central authorities, primarily through ensuring the separation of powers of state and local governments, bolstering the independence of local government bodies, and encouraging the participation of citizens in the exercise of self-governance. This marked an entirely new approach to local governance in the top-down world of the former Soviet Union. The legislation and subsequent local elections in 2006 were assessed by experts as the most promising advance towards local self-governance in Georgian history.

Links to the non-transparent past

¶4. (U) According to the new legislation, the main entities of local self-government are, "a settlement (a self-governing city) or an amalgamation of settlements (municipality), which have local self-government representative and executive bodies." The law does not provide for the institution of the President's Representative in the

regions or a Regional Governor, though it stipulates state supervision over local self-government bodies, which has been in practice since the Shevardnadze era. At that time, the rationale for the state supervision by the President's Representative was the difficult period of transition towards democracy, which necessitated presence of a "strong presidential hand" in the regions. Shevardnadze also established a Governor's Special Fund to "implement targeted programs of regional development." Lacking transparency, this fund has been invalidated by the current government, though the institution of the Representative is being retained. Currently, Georgia has nine regions with respective entities of locally elected governments. However, in addition, each region is also governed by the superimposed authority of the President's Representative.

Links to the unclear future  
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15. (U) In order to address the existing legislative uncertainties surrounding the President's Representative, Georgian Parliament recently adopted two laws: Amendments to the Law on Structure, Authority and the Rule of Activity of the Government of Georgia and Law on State Supervision over the Activities of Local Self-government Bodies. The laws provide for the institution of President's Representative/Governor who "shall be the representative of the President and the Government of Georgia in territorial units". As stipulated by the legislation, the Governor, appointed and dismissed by the President, shall control implementation of the laws of Georgia in territorial units, implement regional programs of social-economic development, provide recommendations on the suspension or termination of local council activities, under circumstances threatening to the sovereignty of

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the country, or constitutional authority of state bodies. Most importantly, Governors shall exercise "state supervision" to ensure "the legality and expediency of the activities of local self-government bodies and officials", and "legal supervision" to ensure "compliance of the normative acts issued by local self-government bodies and officials with Georgian legislation." Beyond coordinating regional interests, goals and policy with those determined by the federal state, Governors shall also administer state budget resources in accordance "with public interests."

16. (U) Critics of the legislation fear that it will bestow too much authority to regional governors, who are not popularly elected and report directly to the president. Furthermore, opponents believe the proposed laws will provide little oversight of the regional administrators from the federal government, and even fewer checks and balances from the local government institutions. Supporters contend that the locally elected officials, most of whom grew up and prospered in the era of rampant corruption of the Shevardnadze period, need additional oversight in order to ensure that federal funds given to local authorities are spent on constituent needs. Indeed, the ruling party forced a group of local officials to resign after they spent most of the local funds from the poor area of Kutaisi on new Mercedes vehicles and the refurbishment of their offices.

Personalities Gallery  
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17. (SBU) At present, the governors who will be given the above leverages to exercise the presidential power in the regions are the following:

Giorgi Natsvlishvili - Kakheti region  
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Kakheti - a wine region of Georgia - comprises eight districts with the total population of approximately 407,182. Kakheti borders on Azerbaijan and North Caucasus and provides shelter to a sizable community of refugees from Chechnya. Gia Natsvlishvili was appointed Governor of Kakheti region on November 27, 2006.

Natsvlishvili was born on July 4, 1963, in Tbilisi. In 1985, he graduated from the Technical University of Georgia faculty of hydro-technical facilities. Natsvlishvili also graduated from the secondary faculty with a major in English technical translation. In 1997, he was awarded a PhD in technical science, and in 2003 the rank of Doctor. He is a member of the International Association of Hydraulic Specialists, author of 30 scientific papers, a member of the International Association of American Scientists "Sigma XI". From 1988 to 2003, Natsvlishvili headed various businesses.

From 1987, Natsvlishvili became involved in the National Liberation Movement and was one of the founders of the Christian-Democratic Union of Georgia. In 1992, he took part in the military actions in Abkhazia and is a veteran of the Abkhazian war. He participated actively in the foundation of the National Movement and was its Executive Secretary until 2004. In 2004, Natsvlishvili became member

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of the Tbilisi Sakrebulo, and was a Member of Georgian Parliament from April 22, 2004, as the Deputy Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Branch Economy and Economic Reforms.

According to a local NGO source, the majority of Kakheti residents think very highly of Natsvlishvili as a young and energetic leader, and he has a positive reputation among civil society actors in Kakheti.

Vasil Maghlaperidze - Mtskheta- Mtianeti  
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Mtskheta- Mtianeti is rich in hydro-resources and forest parks, and has good prospects for livestock, grain harvesting and beer production. The region of Georgia's ancient capital Mtskheta also has a significant potential for tourism development. It comprises five districts with the total population of approximately 125,443. Vasil Maghlaperidze was appointed Governor of Mtskheta- Mtianeti on March 1, 2005.

Vasil Maghlaperidze was born in Tbilisi, on September 5, 1958. In 1980, he graduated from the Tbilisi State University

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faculty of philology. In 1989, Maghlaperidze was awarded a PhD in philology. From 1988, he worked as a researcher at the Tbilisi State University department of ancient Georgian literature, and from 1984 to 1999 was a teacher of Georgian language and literature at a secondary school in Tbilisi. In 1999, and again in 2004, Maghlaperidze was elected as a member of Parliament. In 2004, he was elected Chairman of the Georgian Parliament's temporary Commission on restoration of territorial integrity of Georgia.

Maghlaperidze is generally perceived as an obedient and decent public servant who will neither do any damage, nor be proactive to achieve independent results.

Mikheil Kareli - Shida Kartli  
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Shida Kartli has a strong potential for fruit and vegetable processing industry development. The region actually encompasses the conflict zone in South Ossetia and comprises

four districts under Georgian jurisdiction, with a total population of approximately 314,039. Mikheil Kareli was appointed Governor of Shida Kartli in January 2004.

Kareli was born on September 3, 1975, in the city of Gori. He graduated from the Gori State Economic Institute's economic records faculty with a major in accounting and economic analysis. He also graduated from the Tbilisi State University faculty of law, majoring in jurisprudence, and was awarded the qualification of a lawyer. Kareli worked from 1998 to 2001 as the Sakrebulo Chairman of the Tkviavi community of Gori district. Between 2002 and 2003, he was the Board Chairman of the NGO "Union of Fighting Against Corruption". From 2003 to 2004, Kareli was the executive secretary of the Gori branch of the United National Movement.

Kareli, said to be protigi of the former Minister of Defense Irakli Okruashvili, is also known for his autocratic ways of management. Some believe he rules as a prince of a fiefdom, rather than as a high executive. However, his position, which is owed to an earlier promotion by Okruashvili, has become quite precarious recently.

Zurab Melikishvili - Kvemo Kartli

Kvemo Kartli borders Armenia and Azerbaijan and comprises a major portion of Georgia's ethnic Azeri Muslim population. The region is rich in arable land and pastures for livestock breeding. It consists of six districts with the total population of approximately 497,530. Zurab Melikishvili was appointed Governor of Kvemo Kartli in December 2004.

Melikishvili was born on February 15, 1971, in Tbilisi. In 1993, Melikishvili graduated from the Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University faculty of chemistry, and later in 1997 from the faculty of jurisprudence of the Nutsubidze Institute "Ritorika". Between 1993 and 1996, Melikishvili worked as the chairman of the Georgian International Red Cross Society organization in Vake district; vice-president of the youth organization of the IRCS. From 1999 to 2000, he served as an invited specialist at the Georgian Parliament. Between 2000 and 2001, Melikishvili worked at the Ministry of Justice of Georgia, Head of the Minister's office. Melikishvili was one of the founders of National Movement, as a coordinator of organizational issues. From December 2003 to January 2004, Melikishvili was Governor of Kvemo Kartli. In early 2004, he was appointed First Deputy Head of the President's Office, and served later that year as the State Minister on Regional Issues.

Melikishvili, though a good "apparatchik", makes very rare public appearances and his role in the region is nearly invisible.

Aaki Bobokhidze -Imereti

Imereti is rich in coal, manganese, limestone, mineral waters and hydro resources. The region of Georgia's second largest city of Kutaisi comprises eleven districts with the total population of approximately 699,666. Akaki Bobokhidze was appointed Governor of Imereti in

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November 2006.

Bobokhidze was born on September 14, 1964, in the village Gord, Khoni district. In 1986, he graduated from the Tbilisi Javakhishvili State University faculty of mechanics and mathematics. From 1986 to 1990, Bobokhidze worked at

the Kutaisi Polytechnics Institute. In 1990, Bobokhidze became a member of the Supreme Council of Georgia, and later in 1992, a member of the State Council of Georgia. From 1992 to 1995, he served in the Georgian Parliament. Between 1998 and 2001, Bobokhidze was the Ombudsman's Trustee on Political Issues. From 2001 to 2004, Bobokhidze served a second term in Parliament. In 2005, he was appointed Governor of Imereti. One year later, he resigned from the post to become Head of the National Guard Department. On November 10, 2006, he was re-appointed Governor of Imereti.

At various times, Bobokhidze was a member of both the Republican Party and People's Party, finally joining the National Movement later in his career. His resignation from the Governor's position stemmed from a scandal involving Bobokhidze's assault of a journalist following a television interview. The episode further damaged Bobokhidze's public reputation, which was already held in low esteem due to endeavors seen as opportunistic and self-serving.

#### Giorgi Khachidze - Samtskhe- Javakheti

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Samtskhe-Javakheti borders Turkey and Armenia and comprises the largest portion of Georgia's ethnic Armenians. The region has a strong potential for meat and dairy-products development. It consists of six districts with the total population of approximately 207,598. Giorgi Khachidze was appointed governor of Samtskhe-Javakheti in March 2005.

Khachidze was born on February 9, 1974. In 1997, Khachidze graduated from the Tbilisi State University, majoring in biology and journalism. Between 1994 and 2000, he worked for state-run Channels I and II on Georgian Television, as well as for the television companies "Ibervizia", "Rustavi-2", "202". During this time, Khachidze also worked in the press-service of the Ministry of Defense, as well as for radio station "105", radio "Rezonansi", and newspaper "Rezonansi". In November 2002, he founded the Khashuri office of the "United Democrats" party. From November 2003 to March 2004, he was the Deputy Gamgebeli of Khashuri rayon. From March to October, 2004, he was a Member of Georgian Parliament, elected through National Movement party lists. From October, 2004 to March, 2005 he was appointed Governor in Mtskheta-Mtianeti region.

Khachidze was also a relatively popular pop-singer and managed to transfer his personable qualities to his managerial work as well. Khachidze is quite liked by the local NGO community, which stresses his regular work with civil society organizations and his focus on concrete achievements. Khachidze's strongest asset is said to be his ability to work with people, despite their religion or ethnicity.

#### Zaza Gorozia - Samegrelo and Upper Svaneti

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Samegrelo and Upper Svaneti border on the conflict zone in Abkhazia, and is presently home to the largest share of Georgia's IDPs from Abkhazia. The region is rich in hydro-resources, non-ferrous metals, and arable land for citrus cultivation. It comprises eight districts, including the industrial port town of Poti, with the total population of approximately 466,100. Zaza Gorozia was appointed Governor of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti in July 2005.

Gorozia was born in Martvili district, Samegrelo on February 11, 1975. In 1999, he graduated from the Medical Academy of Tbilisi, and later continued post-graduate studies with the major in healthcare management. From 2000 to 2001, Gorozia worked as an intern at the healthcare department of the

Ministry of Justice of Georgia. In 2003, Gorozia served on the Central Elections Commission. From 2003 to 2005, he was appointed as Deputy, and later promoted as Head of the Tbilisi City Hall's Healthcare and Social Services. He is currently member of

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the United National Movement.

Gorozia is seen by many not only as a good party functionary, but also as a good manager enthusiastic about local projects and capable of delivering results. At the same time, Gorozia still has to overcome another existing perception which holds him as a "cocksure" young guy, "having his fling" while he is still the ruler of Samegrelo region.

Mikheil Svimonishvili - Guria

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Guria holds strong potential for agricultural development of tea, citrus, hazel nuts, and mineral water. The region comprises three districts with the total population of approximately 143,357. Mikheil Svimonishvili was appointed Governor of Guria in November 2006.

Svimonishvili was born on April 7, 1976, in Tbilisi. In 1993, Svimonishvili attended technical college of the German city of Bruchsal, majoring in trade economy, and later pursued post-graduate studies at the Ivane Javakhishvili State University of Tbilisi, with the major in business-information technology. Between 1997 and 1999, he studied in Switzerland at the economic faculty of the Zurich University. In 1998, he took a one-year qualification improvement course at the Swiss Banking School. In 1997, together with Swiss partners, Svimonishvili founded the company "Tskali Margebeli", Ltd., which produces the mineral water Nabeghlavi. At the same time, he is a founder of the Ltd. "Alami" and "Ali Georgian Motors". Until December 2004, he worked as the Head of the Tbilisi City Hall Service of city planning. On December 17, 2004, he was appointed the Minister of Agriculture of Georgia.

Svimonishvili is not perceived as a person wholeheartedly dedicated to the region, but rather as a temporary "fixture" who was assigned to this position against his will and who would be looking for the first feasible opportunity to turn a "new leaf" in his career.

Otar Siradze - Racha-Lechkhumi and Lower Svaneti

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Racha-Lechkhumi and Lower Svaneti holds good prospects for tourism and recreational development. Its rich mineral water resources holds strong potential for the bottled water industry. It comprises four districts with the total population of approximately 50,969. Otar Siradze was appointed Governor of Racha-Lechkhumi and Lower Svaneti in March, 2005.

Siradze was born in 1975 in the town of Ambrolauri, Racha region. In 1997, he graduated from the Humanities Institute of Georgia with the qualification of the manager of economic relations. He later continued post-graduate studies in economics at the State University of Tbilisi. Between 1995 and 2002, Siradze worked as the Deputy Director of company Laba, Ltd., and as Assistant Head of the Office of the Minister of State Property Management. From 2003 to 2004, he was the Head of the Office of the Agency of Enterprise Management, a public legal entity. In 2005, Siradze was appointed the Deputy Head of the Georgian Government's Department on Regional Policy.

Siradze is probably the least known Governor of the

regions of Georgia, apparently shunning any public appearances. Racha-Lechkhumi and Lower Svaneti, one of the most beautiful parts of Georgia, would benefit tremendously from having energetic leadership focused on intensive road development and local tourism/recreation development projects.

Comment

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18. (SBU) Comment: Strengthening of the institution of regional governors Q unelected officials appointed by and directly subordinate to the president may help with the development and subsequent implementation of comprehensive strategies for the economic development of GeorgiaQs regions. It is also a way to provide oversight over the fledgling and inexperienced (at least in democracy) local officials. Based on a review of qualifications, background, and performance in current and previous positions, there is some question as to whether the actual incumbents can

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be expected to perform their mandates effectively. It will be important that implementation of these laws is done in a way which allows for the continued decentralization of federal structures, empowerment of locally elected officials, and deferral of decisions to the local level. We will actively encourage such an approach. End comment. TEFFT